



WASHBURN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

Washburn University School of Law Speaker Guide

When a speaker visits the Law School, it provides opportunities for us to learn how practitioners and scholars at other institutions are thinking and talking, thereby enabling us to deepen our understanding about a topic; establish or maintain our individual relationships with the visitor; and network with members of the local and national legal communities.

Serving as host for a visiting speaker takes effort, planning, and care. Speakers also appreciate having a specified individual they can rely on to smooth their way logistically and steer them through a potentially unfamiliar environment. This guide will address the entire process, from invitations to thank-you notes.

Invitations

Good speakers tend to be in high demand, and their calendars fill up quickly. Try to extend invitations as far in advance as possible. An invitation can be simple: a few sentences naming the forum, day and time, and possible dates. The tone should convey care and respect. It should ideally be sent by someone that the speaker knows personally. If the speaker doesn't know much about you or your program, it would help to include a few sentences explaining who the audience is and why they will be interested to hear what the speaker has to say.

Title

Once the speaker accepts your invitation, express delight and ask for several items of information. Early on you'll need a title of the talk, an abstract, and a biography (or "bio," for short). The title should be crafted with the audience in mind, and when you ask for a title it is a good idea to explain the core audience that you're hoping to attract. Although it's usually easy to get a title, busy speakers often delay in providing you with an abstract and bio. So ask ahead of time and provide regular gentle reminders.

Abstract

The abstract is a one-paragraph summary of the content of the talk. A good abstract will communicate the central idea of the presentation, concisely and in broadly accessible language. A bad abstract sounds like a question; a good abstract sounds like an answer.

Biography

Ask the speaker for a biography. You need the bio for two purposes: advertising the talk and introducing the speaker. A bio is written in the third person (*e.g.*, “Jane Bond received her J.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1985,” but not “I received my J.D. in ...”).

A/V Equipment

Find out what audio/visual equipment the speaker will need. This might include an overhead projector, slide projector, video playback, or computer projection screen. If the room is large, you might have to reserve a microphone or ask a professional to operate the equipment. Compatibility is also an issue. If the speaker specifically needs to make a PowerPoint presentation, for example, make sure you've got the right platform, and the right version of the software, and that the files open and transfer, etc. All such questions are best answered by Glen McBeth or Barbara Ginzburg in the Law Library.

Expenses & Reimbursements

Let the speaker know in advance whether you will be reimbursing any expenses. If you are reimbursing expenses, it is best to communicate the mechanics of the reimbursement process up front. If forms need to be filled out, try to send them ahead of time, and make sure the speaker knows precisely where to send them. If you are reimbursing some expenses but not others, or if you have a limit, communicate that also.

Room

Reserve a good room for the event. Please contact a faculty secretary for assistance. Err on the small side: the last thing you want is an audience of 20 in a room for 150. Make sure that the speaker's A/V requirements are compatible with the room. For example, make sure that a screen is available, if needed, or whether overhead video projection or whiteboards and markers are available, and whether there will be handouts. If the room is unfamiliar to any large part of your audience, you will need to post signs.

Refreshments

If caterers are going to bring refreshments, make sure that they know where the room is located. If you have to change the location, tell the caterers at least twice and consider placing a sign on the door of the original room directing guests to the new location. Avoid offering any noisy foods, such as crunchy chips or crispy vegetables. Ensure that there are garbage cans available for trash, and please consider moving full trash cans into the Commons area so that classrooms do not smell like food for the rest of the day and evening. For suggestions on caterers and menu selections, please see Dean Anders.

Netcasting

The question often arises of whether to “netcast” a talk -- that is, to send out audio or audio-plus-video of the talk on the Internet. Although it sounds great in the abstract, netcasting cannot be treated casually as an add-on to a conventional colloquium event. Unless your target audience consists of users who have a lot of bandwidth on their

desktops, the quality of your netcast will be poor. If the event is going to be videotaped, broadcast, or recorded, then most speakers will definitely want to know in advance, and you should find out whether some kind of written release will be required.

Advertising/Publicity

Inviting someone to speak is a chance to establish new connections with people in your area who might not know about you. Unfortunately, however, most events are not advertised effectively. The key is to advertise through several channels. The more formal the event is, the more widely it should be advertised. If you don't already have a mailing list that is specifically designed for announcing events, you should create one.

Send the calendar of speakers to internal newspapers and newsletters. Prepare a poster with the schedule of speakers (and their titles and the room and time) and send it to all relevant departments on campus as well as to local firms and bar associations. Use colored paper. Include a map, parking information, and the cost of attendance, if any.

Maintaining a web page for your speaker series is another idea. Mention the URL in your other advertising. Note, however, that web pages do not substitute for other forms of advertising. You might also consider enhancing the web page with links to the speakers' home pages. Adding your event to the Events/Room Calendar online will ensure that it appears on the Washburn Law website. Finally, if you are organizing a formal talk with a prominent speaker, ask the Public Information Director to assist you with writing a press release and calendar notice and send them to all of the local media.

Bibliography

Gather a bibliography of the speaker's works and make it available to anyone who is interested. You might also want to have a few copies on hand during the event.

Scheduling

Even though the formal presentation is the primary reason for the visit, students and faculty may also wish to meet with the speaker either individually or in small groups. Mention this to the speaker ahead of time, and find out how much time is available for such meetings. Be aware of jet lag. Speakers from time zones to your East should be scheduled for breakfast but not for dinner, and any speaker who has traveled a long way may have a diminished capacity for work. You might ask about the speaker's precise availability for meetings; some speakers will want to visit with family or friends while they are in town.

As a general rule, people who already know the speaker should be scheduled to meet with him or her before the talk, and people who do not already know the speaker should be scheduled after the talk. The host should set up this schedule in advance, making sure to give everyone (including people from other departments) an opportunity to book time. Speakers are often under-used, and you should give real thought to making the best use of the speaker's limited time. Ideally students should read some of the speaker's work and

be ready to initiate discussion. You might also schedule some time for the speaker to be provided with an Internet connection for reading e-mail. Finally, ask the precise hour when the speaker needs to leave. Then schedule a little slack toward the end so you can be certain of getting them out on time.

Meals

If the speaker is arriving the night before the speaking engagement, find out whether he or she would like to go to dinner. Determine your budget ahead of time. You might want to check whether the speaker drinks alcohol or has any dietary guidelines. It might also be useful to define with the speaker ahead of time the hour at which his or her day should end. If everyone is welcome to dinner, then announce that fact right before you introduce the speaker. It's not good enough to organize the dinner spontaneously after the talk is over, as feelings can be hurt among those who don't happen to hear about it.

Prepare the Speaker

Tell the speaker something about the audience: how many, their background, whether they've read the speaker's work (perhaps as a requirement for a course), recent controversies that may affect the audience's perception of the speaker's message, how many questions they ask, and whether they typically ask questions during the talk or hold them until the end. Tell the speaker whether his or her presentation is part of a series and, if so, who some of the other speakers in the series will be. Explain in advance the precise format (*e.g.*, 25 minutes of talk followed by 15 minutes of questions and answers). If lunch will be served while the speaker is speaking, consider offering the speaker a chance to eat something before speaking. If the event is going to be videotaped, broadcast, or recorded, then most speakers will definitely want to know in advance, and you should find out whether some kind of written release will be required.

Logistics: Getting the Speaker to and from the Law School

Speakers may require logistical support. This can include picking them up at the airport, reserving hotel rooms, putting them up at your house, etc. Ask in advance. To prepare for logistical emergencies, send the speaker complete contact information (work phone, home phone, fax number, e-mail address, mailing address, phone numbers for the university and department, and contact information for the hotel). If you do make a hotel reservation for the speaker, put the reservation in the speaker's own name so that he or she can contact the hotel directly about any details.

Offer to send maps and directions. Find out whether the speaker is familiar with the layouts of Topeka, Washburn University, and the Law School. First-time visitors in particular should receive lavish logistical support, including tourist-type information and most especially someone to meet them at the airport baggage claim with one of those clipboards with the visitor's name magic-markered on it. You should certainly be on time; nobody likes to feel lost in a strange airport. Speakers arriving at the airport are

usually tired and dehydrated, so ask if they want to go to their hotel first, whether they want to make phone calls or stop by a store, etc.

If the speaker is driving to your institution, then you should provide especially detailed and clear directions. Parking can be challenging for a visitor, even when it seems easy to others, so you might arrange a reserved parking space or buy a parking permit in advance and mail it. Please contact the Dean Anders for assistance.

Signs

If strangers will be attending the talk, you can make them feel welcome by putting up signs to guide them. If you have put up posters for the talk, you can simply put additional copies of the poster with prominent magic-markered arrows at the front of the building (very important for people who have never been to your building before), next to the elevator, and at major decision-points along the route to the room. The room may have several doors, one of which opens directly onto the front of the room where the speaker will be speaking. In that case, you might consider posting a sign such as “please use the other door” (with an arrow) on that particular door, thereby saving everyone a lot of disruption and embarrassment as latecomers enter.

Itinerary

Upon arrival, give the speaker a schedule of the day’s events. (The speaker will appreciate if you annotate the schedule with a phrase describing each person with whom the speaker will be meeting individually.) Providing a floor plan of your building would be a nice touch, if one is available. Also keep a copy of the schedule for yourself and give a copy to everybody whose name appears on it (this will encourage them to finish their meetings on time), as well as everyone who might answer calls about the event. Make clear to the speaker that you know what time they need to leave for the day, and that you are watching the clock. That way they can relax and focus on their interactions with you and your colleagues.

Attire

It may sound unimportant to consider what you’re wearing when hosting a speaker, but people notice and first impressions matter. Even though you are a student, you are a member of the legal profession as well as a representative of Washburn Law. It is likely that the speaker will be wearing a suit, so at the very least, it would be advisable to wear business casual attire on that day. That way, you will be polished, professional, and comfortable in any environment throughout the day. The speaker will be flattered that you took the effort to look your best, thereby making him or her feel that you consider this to be an important occasion. This could be someone who might offer you a job someday.

So what, exactly, is business casual? Acceptable options for men include khaki slacks, collared shirts, nice sweaters, and possibly a blazer, with closed-toe shoes. Unacceptable

attire includes t-shirts with slogans, torn or worn-out jeans, shorts, tank tops, and sandals. Acceptable options for women include nice slacks or khakis, tailored skirts, a simple dress, sweater sets, and closed-toe shoes. In addition to the unacceptable attire listed for men, women should also refrain from wearing spandex, mini skirts, strapless tops, and exercise clothing. If you are unsure, please see Dean Anders for suggestions.

Conversation Topics

When making small talk with the speaker, avoid personal matters like family. Don't try to make a good impression by showing how smart you are. Don't try to discuss complex intellectual topics when walking down a corridor unless such topics have flowed naturally from something else. Keep the conversation simple if the speaker is tired or cranky from traveling. When first picking the speaker up at the airport, small talk about their trip is best. The point is simply to make clear that you are taking the speaker's visit seriously and wish to establish a professional relationship.

Before the talk

Speakers often like to check out the room before the talk, even if meetings have been scheduled all day. Make a little time for this, or just include the room in a morning tour of the building. Point out the A/V equipment, and if the equipment is complicated, suggest testing it with the speaker's tape or slides. Many speakers also want a little time alone before the talk. This time should not be spent in the room where the talk will be held, as the speaker might feel obligated to socialize with the gathering audience.

Equip the podium with something to drink, such as bottled water. You should also clear out extra chairs and other clutter from the front of the room, make sure any wires are taped to the floor, pick up trash, erase the chalkboard, make sure there's enough chalk, and generally make the place presentable. If you think the speaker might need an assistant, by all means volunteer.

Introducing the Speaker

One of the most important tasks is introducing the speaker. In the actual introduction of the speaker, the main thing is to recite facts from the bio. The simplest introduction begins with, "It's my great pleasure to introduce our speaker for today, Jane Bond," and then proceeds through the bio verbatim. You can do much better. At a minimum, you should read the bio to yourself a few times before the appointed hour of the event, preferably out loud, so that you sound comfortable when you read it for the audience. Make sure ahead of time that you know how to pronounce the speaker's name.

However, even a well-rehearsed recitation of the speaker's bio can be improved. It is much better if you can write your own introduction, maybe just an outline if you're comfortable on stage, drawing on facts from the bio but then adding some words of your own. If you know the speaker personally then you can tell how you met, or the history of your relationship, or how the speaker's work has influenced your own, or particular

qualities you admire. If you're brave then you can tell an anecdote. It sounds silly, but these details matter. It shows everyone that this is a place where collegial relationships among scholars are important.

During the Talk

You probably won't have any duties during the talk other than modeling rapt attention. During the talk you might also be alert for shortages of drinking water, wires that the speaker might trip over, or distracting noises inside or outside of the room.

When the speaker finishes, stand up and announce that it is time for questions. Look at the clock and remind everyone of the precise hour at which the event will end. Have a couple questions of your own prepared, just in case no one else has the courage to ask the first question, or in case the discussion begins to drag.

About five minutes before the official ending hour, stand up. Wait for the ongoing question-and-answer to finish, and announce that “we have time for one more question.” Then keep standing. That way it will be less obtrusive when you announce that it's time to thank the speaker for attending, thereby soliciting applause and permitting the crowd to stand up and chat. Some members of the audience will probably come up to the speaker to after he or she has finished, and you should allow time for this in the schedule. You might also offer the speaker a beverage.

End of the Visit

Don't just let the speaker's schedule fade out at the end of the day. Know who will say a simple goodbye, and how the speaker will get to the airport. If you volunteer to take somebody to the airport, make a special point of arriving early to avoid worry.

Event Wrap-up

A thank-you note a few days after the event will create a sense of closure for the event. This note should be typed and sent via postal mail. You will want to write formal thank-you notes to speakers, special guests, and anyone else who has contributed to the success of the event.

In addition, set aside time to evaluate your meeting. Did it accomplish what you wanted? Was the agenda flawed? Did you lose control at any point? Did you invite the right people for your purpose? What could have been better? Did a problem crop up that you should have anticipated, but didn't? What advice can you pass along to others?

It is all too common a practice to become wedded to a particular meeting format, even if it is not working. However, by analyzing each event you hold – good, bad, or indifferent – and doing so while the particulars are still fresh in your memory, you open the door to constant improvement.

Sources:

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